
Dr. King's
Last Day

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This is an autobiographical work by
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Dedicated to the unsung volunteers,
many of whom equally risked
life and limb in manifesting
Dr. King's Dream.

Commentary

This is an autobiographical account of the day that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. This is the first time this story has been told by someone who was there. Although there is a twenty page FBI file detailing my supposed interview with them, I was never interviewed by any investigator regarding his death.

That day started much like most others. Although it was rare to be sitting together with Dr. King and the inner circle personally, the work was the same. The activities seem larger-than-life now; however, there was much mundane and tedious work in order to make them happen. We regularly made recruitment and encouragement phone calls, and wrote letters asking folks to participate. All volunteers were required to embrace the possibility of death and to do so with grace and a compassionate mindset in the face of their oppressor. We spent much time asking folks

to risk their lives for a greater cause, and many had died already.

Having been involved in the Civil Rights Movement and politics from 1962 forward, I organized and participated in multiple protest marches. I sang my freedom songs, choosing the old Negro spiritual “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” as my mantra.

The history books are filled with the senseless tragedies of those who marched, and of those who accidentally fell out of step with the status quo. We are aware of Emmitt Till, murdered for whistling at a white girl, and that his murderers walked free out of that trial. We know of the four little girls in Alabama who died in a church bombing. But do we fully understand that lynchings were a regular occurrence?

The truth is that all of the volunteers were just as heroic as Dr. King. He was a regular man with a melodious voice and wise oratory. He had the insight to train the volunteers in the mindset of Ghandi’s peaceful resistance philosophy. Dr. King was flawed, just as we all

are, and we are all just as capable of doing the great works necessary to see the Dream become real.

Growing up in a society of visible and invisible walls of segregation, discrimination and prejudice, I recognized the injustices as early as eight years of age. My neighbor and friend, Margaret Vittitow was a white child who lived across the street from me. We could not attend the same elementary school because she was white and I was colored.

In the neighborhood where my father chose to purchase a home, the block was in transition from white to black. During my teen years there were thirteen teachers (both men and women), three doctors (medical, dentist and PhD), postal employees, a school janitor and Joseph R. Ray, Sr.

Mr. Ray was the former Secretary-Treasurer of the first black-owned bank in Louisville, the Standard. His son, “Joie” Ray, was the first Black race car driver to participate in NASCAR races.

At sixteen years of age, I went to the Jefferson County Clerk's Office to obtain an operator's license to drive a car. The clerk asked the usual information regarding name, address and so forth and then looked up at me to ask "race?"

I asked, "What does race have to do with driving a car?" Twenty-eight years later, I introduced a bill in the Kentucky State Senate and eliminated "race" from operator licenses.

During my sixteenth year, I was hired by Grant's five & dime store to serve root beer and hot dogs at a stand-up counter. I was told when hired, "You may sell to colored people, but they cannot stand at the counter and eat." One day, my physics teacher from Central High School, Victor Perry, who was a black man, came up to the counter when he saw me working there. I served him and talked with him as he ate. After he left, my supervisor came to me and said, "I would like to see you in the office at the end of your shift." I did not wait, instead, I went directly to the office to quit. When I reached the office I was handed a small envelope containing

pay due me and it wasn't pay day. I was fired and quit at the same time.

As I grew older and out of my teens, I began to notice other forms of separation by race in the churches, neighborhoods, trains, hotels, city parks, funeral homes, cemeteries, public restrooms, public water fountains and restaurants. Even hospitals were separated by race and class. Poor people who were black and white went to the same city hospital and both were treated with indignities showing a hatred for poor people regardless of color.

I bring up these specific incidents because these types of discriminatory incidents have a lasting and deleterious affect upon one's life. The insidious disease that is prejudice and the resultant segregation permeated and surrounded me everywhere in my community.

My father, Ben Montgomery, who was assumed to be white, suffered many insults and indignities because he was married to a black woman and had colored children. My father would have taken us in to sit down and eat at restaurants but, because serving blacks in this

fashion was not allowed, he would go in by himself and bring food out for his family and we all would eat it in the car.

On Saturday nights, he would take us for a ride in downtown Louisville to do people watching. We would end up parking on either Walnut Street where the black businesses were, or on Fourth Street where the white folks were. One time, his co-worker saw us parked on Fourth Street and immediately reported to his fellow co-workers that “Ben has a colored family.” He then organized a few of these workers together and stated they would not work with my father any longer.

The President of the American Standard Company called the enamelers together and said, “I understand there is a rumor going around about Ben Montgomery. I have heard some of you are not willing to work with him. Those of you who are willing to work with him, stand on my right. Those of you who do not want to work with Ben, stand on my left and pick up your paycheck today, you’re fired.” My

father worked at American Standard for forty-two years without any more such incidents.

Coincidentally, when I was elected to the Kentucky Senate, I met two senators, “Fibber McGee” and Danny Myers, who had been my father’s helpers in the foundry. They pulled the hot iron tubs in and out of the furnace, and my father sifted the fine white enamel evenly over the hot tub. They respected my father very much, saying, “He was an expert evenly spreading the enamel.”

That bit of family history was a great lesson for me to store in my memory bank. I have told it many times over the years to various leaders including governors, U. S. senators and others in positions of power, in hope of influencing them to emulate a bold and courageous action that was taken by the President of the company.

I also learned the importance of negotiating from a position of advantage. My father had leverage because he was highly skilled and worked well with others. He earned respect of the leadership.

My mother's sister was married to James Washington, a black man who worked in the foundry but not as an enameler. Enamelers were a choice position as they only worked six hours a day, five days a week and were paid more than the other foundry workers. To be an enameler, one had to be skilled in sifting the fine enamel powder evenly on the hot iron tub before it was placed back into the hot furnace. When he went to the President of the company to inquire about becoming an enameler, he was told, "We do not have any colored enamelers."

His response to the President was, "Yes you do, my brother-in-law is an enameler and is married to my wife's sister." He was never considered.

Being discriminated against because of race made one feel less than who they were. It made me wonder about what I was being taught in the Judeo-Christian religion that we all were made in the "image of God." My question was, "But, did not God make me, too?" When the wall of separation is up, are we not saying to the Creator, "I love you, but not your creation?"

It is an entire lifetime for a person of color to strive for first class citizenship, equality and equity in what this country has to offer. The thought never occurred to me to think, “I want to be somebody.” I always knew I was somebody and somebody special.

It was embedded into my mind to fight discrimination anywhere I found it. Incidents like these inspired me to become involved in a public accommodations law that was introduced in the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1964.

With the leadership of Frank Stanley, Jr., the young editor of the local weekly black newspaper, The Louisville Defender, I volunteered with him and several others to organize a group called Allied Organizations for Civil Rights (AOCR) as an advocate for the bill. We organized the “March on Frankfort” which was held at our state capitol in order to show support for the pending bill. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jackie Robinson were the principal speakers. The musical group called Peter, Paul and Mary were the entertainers.

More than 10,000 people attended from Kentucky and surrounding states.

My brother, Lawrence Montgomery, who owned Hathaway and Clark Funeral Home, drove me to the Louisville airport to pick up Dr. King and Jackie Robinson. My brother then drove us the sixty miles from Louisville to Frankfort where they were to speak at the march. This was the first time I met Dr. King and my first meeting with Mr. Robinson as well.

There was a sea of people awaiting the arrival of these two men. Governor Edward T. Breathitt was in his Capitol Building office, however, he would not come out and greet the people gathered there.

At the end of the rally I took Dr. King and the other speakers with me as I marched in the Governor's office to see him. I felt privileged to do this as I had worked as State Chair of Volunteers in his campaign the previous year in the Kentucky Primary and during the General Election in order to help get him elected governor.

When we went into the office, the receptionist said to me, “Georgia, I’m surprised at you.” She was a woman that I had worked with in the Governor’s campaign. Everyone who worked in the campaign was hired in the administration after he was elected, except me.

I said to her, “I’m sure you are. And I’m surprised at the Governor that he gave everybody a job but me.”

While the bill was not passed in that legislative session, it passed shortly thereafter and was the most progressive law in the south. It integrated public accommodations such as restaurants, hotels and so forth.

My mother, Frances Walker Montgomery, was instrumental in forming my development and sense of destiny. She was thoughtful, poised, patient and calm with a sense of authority in family matters. I admired her dedication to her family, her tenacity, her tolerance and her joy in raising eight boys and one girl, me.

I had a strong belief that America would ultimately fulfill its obligation to give meaning to democracy for all its citizens.

It is still a work in progress.

Chapter 1

Pathway To A Journey's End

On January 30, 1968, twenty-one black employees working in the sewer and drains division of the city's Public Works Department were sent home without a full day's pay because of rain. However, other workers were allowed to stay, including white supervisors. This practice was routine, but T. O. Jones, president of Local #1733 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), urged the men to stay off from work the next day while he reported that he wanted the practice to end.

Around the same time, two black employees in the sewer and drains division of the City Public Works Department were crushed to death by a mechanical packing unit on their garbage truck. The emotions of fair-minded people were being aroused and they sought action.

On February 12, 1968, more than one thousand Memphis sanitation workers voted

to strike for better wages, better benefits, job safety and union recognition from the Mayor of Memphis, Tennessee, Henry Loeb. Civic groups tried to resolve the problem but the Mayor would not relent.

Reverend James Lawson, pastor of Centenary Methodist Church and a veteran of the Civil Rights Movement, invited Dr. King to come to Memphis and participate in a city-wide boycott. At this time, Dr. King and other civil rights workers were in Atlanta planning for the Poor People's Campaign to work towards equality and help with economic strategies for the poor. King had been traveling across the country to various speaking engagements as President of SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) and was busy raising money for operation of the organization. He agreed to lend his support to the striking workers, as he told them on March 18th while he was there, and vowed to return later in the month for a massive rally and march. He was assured by Reverend Lawson it would be a non-

violent march as Lawson said, “We have not had any violence in previous marches.”

Dr. King was discouraged by some of his advisers and was told he shouldn’t go to Memphis but, as he said many times, “These are the people who need my help the most: the underpaid, the street sweepers, the garbage tippers and the unrecognized workers without bargaining power.” It was Dr. King’s intention to lead 6000 protesters in a non-violent march on that March 28th through downtown Memphis, Tennessee in support of these striking sanitation workers.

Unfortunately, the ‘Invaders’, a group of young men used the march as a cover to commit acts of violence. Soon afterwards, the march was disrupted by this group. Violence broke out, looting ensued. It was estimated that sixty people were injured and one looter was killed.

President Johnson stated on March 30th, “Federal assistance is available to Memphis if it is needed to maintain order,” as the city went into nights of curfew. The city issued injunctions against Dr. King and his associates,

Ralph Abernathy, Hosea Williams, James Bevel, James Orange and Bernard Lee prohibiting them from organizing another march.

Dr. King, a profound believer in non-violence, was greatly disturbed. A few days following the riotous parade, Dr. King and his fellow organizers met with the faction leaders who disagreed with him. They met trying to reconcile their differences and promised Dr. King non-violence and unity. King then promised them he would return and lead the march on April 5, 1968, as was first scheduled.

I was greatly interested in the outcome of the strike and the anticipated results.

Chapter 2

Running With Lukey

The Kentucky General Assembly ended its regular session March 15th by voting *sine die* at 2:00 A.M. It is an unwritten law that at midnight the clock would be set back to give legislators time to complete the business of the legislative session. As I left the Capitol at 4:00 A.M., I picked up my belongings at the hotel and left Frankfort for home, sixty miles to Louisville. I had only a few hours of sleep but I was excited to go home and continue my life at a slower pace.

Lucretia “Lukey” Ward called me the next day. We were introduced around 1962 at a civil rights meeting organized by Rev. A.D. King. She volunteered for many years in civil rights issues such as public accommodations, women’s issues, unemployment for minorities and domestic violence. Even though we didn’t always agree on the same candidate, I had worked and become political friends with her over the years. We had never invited each other to social events or to our respective homes at

that point. However, she had called to ask me to travel with her to Florida for a month of sun, sand and sea. She knew I was in the process of divorce from my husband and thought I needed to “get away” for awhile and to rest after the just finished busy session. I jumped at the opportunity.

I let her know it would take me a few days to organize my house business, pay bills and let my family and friends know I was going to be out of town. Since I lived alone, it only took me three days to make the necessary arrangements and I was ready to travel. This trip was just what I needed in order to have the time and space to really think about what I was going to do with the rest of my personal life. I had two more years of my senate term left and knew I would be kept busy with constituents during the interim.

Lukey picked me up on March 18th in her baby blue convertible Cadillac and we headed south on I-65. We arrived in Birmingham, Alabama just as the sun was descending from sight. This was our first stop.

I had my trepidations as we drove off the highway into a Holiday Inn parking lot. I knew the National Voting Rights Act became law in 1964 and the Public Accommodations and Fair Employment Act became law in 1965, signed by President Lyndon Johnson. However, I was not convinced the news had reached the south. The question in my mind was, "Is it being enforced here in Birmingham?" I had read and had heard a lot about the southern traditions and how black people were treated there.

I waited in the car while Lukey went into the hotel to check out the situation. She came back, and all was fine and they had a room for us. We awakened early the next morning, dressed and went to the dining room for breakfast. We left Birmingham around 9:00 A.M. and continued on with our trip to Florida.

Our next stop was Jackson, Mississippi to service the car. We stopped at a country store which had two gas pumps out front. When the attendant came out to pump the gas, I slid down in the car with my sunglasses on and a cap pulled down over my face. After we left from

there, we talked about how I thought about us being an unlikely couple, a black woman and a white woman riding together in the south.

We talked about what could happen. She said, “G.D., my skin is darker than yours. I don’t know why you are so nervous.”

“But I am,” I told her.

Lukey had deep suntan which had dried and wrinkled her skin. Her jet black hair accentuated her complexion. I told her I had heard so many horror stories about how black folk were treated and how “white folk didn’t like white folk who associated with black folk.”

Chapter 3

Florida Experience

Lukey Ward's and my journey continued on to Florida. We arrived at Ft. Walton Beach just as the beautiful, orange magnificent sun was setting in the west. The sun looked close enough for us to simply reach out and touch. We drove into a complex of several one-story apartment buildings which faced the ocean. Lukey went to the office and made arrangements for us to rent a two-bedroom apartment with a balcony facing the ocean. The sea was roaring, sounding like water gushing over a cliff into a cavern. I was fascinated by the ocean and the sound of it, but I was not yet comfortable vacationing in the south.

Once we settled in, we put on our bathing suits, having decided we were going to stroll the beach. I immediately loved the powerful sound of the ocean as it ebbed and flowed to the edge of the sand, gushing up many feet into the air before rolling back into the sea. Webster said it best describing this as "the reflux of the tide towards the sea."

Lukey had told me she wanted to use this time to write. However, I never saw her write, not even a postcard. We spent much of our time talking about our private lives and past histories. She had a troubled childhood and was working through healing that in her mind. She listened through my thoughts and concerns regarding the work I was doing, and helped me as a friend.

The first two weeks we arose early in the morning to see the picturesque sun rising over the ocean. We treated ourselves every day at a nearby seafood shop where we purchased fresh shrimp and cocktail sauce. Lukey and I walked the beach, picking up odd shaped rocks and shells of many colors and shapes that we found along the way. After many days of this routine, it became boring to me.

I said, “Lukey, all of my life I have heard of white folks coming to Florida in the winter to get away from the cold weather in the north. Is picking up shells and rocks on the beach a certain ritual or a simple form of relaxation?”

What do they do, string them and wear them as necklaces?” We both were laughing.

Lukey told me, “No, some of them have yachts or fishing boats, and they go to clubs in the evening for dinner and dancing.”

I said to her, “Well, Lukey, I thought it must be more than just playing the shell game. By the way, where is your yacht?”

She laughed and said, “I left it at the dock.”

I asked, “Was that the ‘Dock of the Bay’ Otis Redding sang about sitting on?”

“Yes, of course,” she said.

We went on to enjoy a good laugh about ourselves and good conversations about incidents that had happened, people we knew and the civil rights events we had both been involved in. We talked about the March 5, 1964 “March on Frankfort”. Lukey and I laughed at how cold it had been that blustery day with showers of fine sleet and how still over 10,000 people showed up.

We reminisced about how we were able to raise \$3,200 in order to lease Purdue

University's football airplane to take Kentuckians to join the Selma, Alabama march in 1965 and about our brief stop in Atlanta to pick up Dr. King and three of his staff members.

As we watched the evening news on television each night, it showed the action of the garbagemen's strike in Memphis.

Chapter 4

Call to Action

After I saw the riot on television, I called Dr. King's office in Atlanta on March 29th. Dora McDonald, his secretary, said, "He's out of town but I will have him return your call when we hear from him."

Dr. King called me back that evening. I could tell by his voice he was tired and discouraged.

He said, "Senator, why don't you come to Memphis and help me?"

I answered back saying, "I will arrange to be there next week."

Dr. King said, "Come to the Lorraine Motel. There will be a room reserved for you."

Lukey was sitting with me, listening to our conversation. Not having any idea how far it was from Ft. Walton Beach to Memphis, Tennessee, I asked her if she would drive me there. Her response was negative and she told me she wanted to stay in Florida until the end of the month but said she would be glad to help

me get to the airport. I then told Dr. King on the phone, "Okay, I will be in Memphis."

Later that evening Lukey called Dr. King's brother, Reverend A.D. Williams King in Louisville, Kentucky and told him what my plans were. He asked to speak to me. Lukey handed me the telephone.

A.D. asked, "G.D., why don't you wait for a few days before you go. After I preach at the Sunday morning service at my church, I will fly into Florida Sunday afternoon and spend a couple of days there to get some sun. You know my job is stressful and I need some R&R. Then, we can motor to Memphis on Wednesday."

I replied, "You must be joking about your job, but we will wait for you to get here. That sounds good to me." After hanging up the phone, I said to Lukey, "So you changed your mind? Now, I know what it takes to convince you." We both laughed.

Chapter 5

Road to Memphis

A.D. arrived on Sunday afternoon as planned. Lukey and I met him at the airport and we then went to dinner at a local seafood restaurant. We enjoyed the evening filled with laughter and with talk about what we would be facing in Memphis. A.D. had called his brother to let him know he was coming to Memphis with us and Dr. King was glad for the news. For the next two days, Lukey, A.D. and I simply relaxed enjoying the beach and playing in the ocean.

We packed the car and left Ft. Walton early the morning of Wednesday, April 3. Lukey drove the entire time during what turned out to be an uneventful trip.

We arrived in Memphis at 11:30 that night. A fine mist lingered in the Memphis air. We were told there had been a storm earlier that day. We could tell as our skin felt damp and clammy and the moisture affected our hair.

The heaviness in the air even made breathing uneasy.

Seeing the sign for the Lorraine Motel, we drove into the courtyard off Murray Street. Noticing a SCLC staffer standing on the sidewalk, we asked him where Dr. King was.

He advised, “He’s at a rally at Mason Temple, headquarters for the Church of God in Christ,” and gave us directions on how to get there. We located Mason Temple but the building was dark. We were too late and the rally was already over.

We headed back to the Lorraine Motel, parked and checked in. A.D. signed the register and told me to take room #201 on the first floor of the separate building and he would take room #207. Many years later, I received a copy of the April 3rd hotel registration and he had switched our rooms. The purpose for that was that if his wife had called the Lorraine, she would have gotten me and not Lukey in his room.

The motel was built similar to a Holiday Inn with two stories and a long balcony with a

metal and concrete stairwell at each end. Each room had a door and picture window facing the walkway. At the end of one stairwell was a two-story building making this building and the long balcony an L-shape surrounding the courtyard. From room #201, I could see the doors on the balcony. The two buildings surrounded the courtyard and parking lot.

The room was a typical room with two regular sized beds along with a cheap flower-print picture hanging above each. There was an old model fifteen-inch lamp on a three-drawer maple table between the beds, matching faded draperies and bed spreads. Against the other wall was a maple desk and a matching straight chair. There was a small lamp on the desk. Nearby, there stood a well-worn tan upholstered brown plaid recliner badly in need of cleaning. A floor lamp stood beside the recliner in the corner to the side of the beds, and a small bathroom contained a sink basin, toilet and bathtub. The outdoor carpet in the motel room was well worn. The picture window was next to the door and looked out upon the

courtyard. This was certainly not a five-star hotel, possibly a two, but it was comfortable enough and it was sufficient.

A.D. took room #207 which was on the first floor directly beneath Dr. King's room. This room was very much like mine but had only one single sized regular bed.

The three of us, A.D., Lukey and I, waited in #207 for Dr. King's return. We ordered coffee brought to the room while we waited. Lukey stood in the open doorway and upon seeing a taxi drive into the courtyard close to midnight she said, "Here they come now." Dr. King, Ralph Abernathy and Bernard Lee (King's valet) got out of the taxi.

In that very distinct, deep and melodious voice that was Dr. King's, I heard him call out, "Where is the Senator?" Most of my friends at that time called me 'G.D.', but Martin always called me 'Senator'.

Lukey pointed her finger inward to the room saying, "She's in here."

Dr. King and Ralph came in as we greeted each other. The brothers had not seen each other since Dr. King came to Louisville in August of 1967. The two shook hands and embraced each other.

Dr. King said to A.D., “I am pleased you are here as I have wanted to see you and talk about those calls of distress you made to me threatening suicide. I am happy you listened to the Senator after I called her to come to your house to see what was going on.” King then turned to me and said, “I don’t know what you said to him, but it worked. I thank you for going at that late hour in the night. You talked some sense into his head.”

“I told him it did not make sense for him to worry you with all the stress you live under daily and all the life threats you receive. I admonished A.D. and really shamed him for such foolishness. He had the nerve to say, ‘I was just playing,’ to which I said, ‘what a stupid game.’ That is when I had him to call you in my presence to apologize. Of course, you know,

each time prior to these episodes, they had been out partying.”

Dr. King said, “Each time he called to apologize, I had some very admonishing words for him.”

This was not the first time that Martin and I spoke regarding his brother. Although A.D. was able to decently manage his professional life, he was an alcoholic and had suicidal tendencies. I had occasionally talked with Martin as he worked through the challenges of his brother’s addictions. A.D. was glad to get on another subject saying, “Ralph, tell us about the meeting. I am sorry we arrived too late to be there.” Ralph Abernathy was still ‘on cloud nine’ about the earlier rally where Dr. King made the rousing, prophetic and exciting ‘I’ve been to the Mountaintop’ speech.

Dr. King did not want to hear about it, saying to Ralph, “I know you are still hyped up about your lead-in introduction before me tonight. You were at the top of your oratory! But, can we talk about it tomorrow?”

In unison, we all said yes, because we wanted to hear about the upcoming day.

Dr. King told us, “My plan for tomorrow is to have a staff meeting in my room at 8:00 A.M. I want to give some direction and encouragement to the staff since the riot. They have been very discouraged by the violence which took place.”

Ralph spoke up and said, “They are upset because they know you would never lead a violent march and they know you are upset by it.”

Dr. King said to me, “Senator, if it is alright with you, we will meet in your room at noon tomorrow?” We agreed.

I said, “It is 2:00 A.M. and I think we are all tired and can continue our conversation then. I am going to my room and get some rest. I bid you all goodnight and I will see you tomorrow.”

I started out the door and walked to my room. I heard and felt someone walking behind me, and I knew who it was. We spent two hours

together until around four in the morning, then he returned to his room.

Chapter 6

Dawn to Noon

April, 4, 1968

It was 8:00 A.M. Thursday morning. The sun was shining bright through the courtyard window into my room. I opened the draperies and looked up to the balcony to see who was entering Dr. King's room to attend the scheduled meeting. Reverend Abernathy was already there since they shared room #306.

I watched as Hosea Williams, Chauncey Eskridge, Andrew Young and other key staff members attending this meeting entered the room. My meeting wasn't until that afternoon, so I decided to sleep in a little longer and rose again at 10:30 A.M., and then I readied myself for the day, bathed and dressed casually in shorts and a sleeveless top and prepared for the noon meeting.

At noon, Dr. King and Ralph Abernathy knocked on my door, the first to arrive. I opened the door and invited them in. We greeted each other with a big hug and made small talk about the lack of rest suffered by

everyone. They told me all about the lunch they had just eaten at the hotel restaurant, going into great detail about how they each had ordered a catfish dinner but the server did not understand if they wanted separate plates or one big platter of fish. She finally brought them one huge plate of catfish, slaw, fried potatoes and onions. King and Abernathy declared it was a good old southern cooked food.

I told them, “It sounds more like dinner for five. I guess you two did not think about inviting the rest of us to lunch or even bring us some food?”

They made a joke of it saying, “Well now, Senator, we know you don’t eat that kind of greasy food!”

The knock at the door just then was Lukey and A.D. joining us for the meeting. More greetings and hugs were shared and light conversation flowed. I asked, “A.D., does it smell fishy in this room?”

He acknowledged, “Yes, G.D., it does have an odd odor.”

I then said, “You won’t believe it, but these two ate so much fish at the restaurant, the smell is oozing out of their skin.”

Ralph told them the fish story while I teased Lukey saying, “Good morning, Lukey. Do you know that man who is following you?”

Laughing, she said, “I think he’s a stalker.”

I joked with A.D., enunciating with emphasis, “Reverend Doctor A.D., are you speaking this morning or are you suffering from fatigue? I don’t know why you are tired. I don’t remember you doing any of the driving or even offering to give Lukey any relief.”

He responded, “She does not have to know who I am as long as I know who she is.”

A.D. changed the subject by turning to his brother, Martin, and saying, “How did your staff meeting go this morning? From what I’ve heard, your speech last night was extraordinary. On the way from my room, several people said to me that they wished I had been there, that my brother was ‘dynamic’, ‘prophetic’ and ‘at

his best' last night. One staffer said you 'wowed the crowd' and them, too."

Ralph pulled from his jacket pocket a copy of the morning newspaper which covered the story of Dr. King's speech. Dr. King was laying pensively on the bed looking at the ceiling. At times he closed his eyes, deep in thought. Ralph began reading from the newspaper article, "Martin went from general principles to specific actions and into a strangely prophetic finale." He continued reading, "Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And, I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But, I am not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And, he's allowed me to go to the mountain, and I've looked over, and I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you, but I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. And so, I am happy tonight. I'm not worried about

anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"

We sat there in awe of his prophesy and realized he had received so many threats on his life, which we took for granted. A.D., in trying to be upbeat, said "Brother, you hit a rare moment in history in your speech, which came from your heart and out of your black experience. Are the threats coming more frequently or are they subsiding?"

That question was not answered. Ralph then said, "A.D., you will want a copy of that tape. I will see to it you get one. You will keep it for the rest of your life. It was different last night. Martin was tired and resting at the hotel and he asked me to go and take his place. I told him I would. When I arrived at the church and saw the crowd rushing in to get seated, I knew he had to be there. As I walked through the aisle towards the pulpit, no one made any sign of noticing or expecting me. I met Jesse (Jackson) who inquired about Martin and asked if Dr. King was coming. I told him that King had sent me to take his place. Jesse could tell

I was anxious about giving a speech and said to me, ‘Ralph, if you don’t want to, I will speak tonight.’ I told him no, that I would speak. As the church became packed to the limit, the crowd was getting restless. I went to the church office phone and called Martin at the hotel. I told him, ‘Martin, please come, you must. The people came to hear you, not me and not Jesse who has offered to speak.’ He said, ‘Ralph, I will come. Start the meeting. I will be there.’”

Ralph was very excited telling us the story saying, “To get the program started, the congregation sang familiar Christian and freedom songs. When Martin entered the church and walked down the aisle to the pulpit, the crowd went wild. He could hardly get through the crowd with people wanting to touch him. For the first time, I spoke before him. Usually, I do the wrap-up, but last night was different.” Ralph then looked at Martin and said, “Doc, will you admit I gave you an introduction which was the best I’ve ever done? It was a rousing and stirring introduction. I warmed and readied the crowd for the master

orator. You were magnificent! I wanted the people to really know who you are. Too often, we take our leaders for granted but, on an impulse, I started with your birth, your early school years, your civil rights involvement and your present actions in Memphis. I wanted to sum up your greatness. The crowd went crazy. You spoke for an hour and a half. You were truly at the top of your oratory.”

“Ralph,” King said, “You were great and I am beginning to think they didn’t need to hear me. After all, you stirred the crowd into a frenzy.”

In unison, we all said how sorry we were unable to get to Memphis in time to hear the speech, with Lukey saying, “We should have left Florida sooner.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “We could have made it sooner if A.D. didn’t have to relieve himself so often. I think he has kidney trouble.”

Martin then joined with me in teasing A.D. saying, “He always did have to make more pit stops on the road than anybody else. It must

be because of the abundance of liquids he consumes, or else his kidneys are weakening.”

A.D. responded, “There is nothing wrong with my kidneys or at least I hope not!”

Dr. King then got serious and said, “Senator, do you realize this is the first time I have seen you since you won the senate seat in Kentucky? I heard from my brother that you did a great job in your first term. Did you have to fight those men off of you?”

Laughing, I said, “Now, Dr. King, as for those thirty-seven white men, they just looked at me adoringly. They thought I would just sit there, keep quiet and look cute. They soon found out differently.”

He asked me, “What did you do to gain their confidence?”

“They thought I would be easy because I smiled at them when we met. They did not know what was behind that smile. They soon found out I was no pushover when I introduced a fair housing bill prohibiting discrimination in the sale and rental of property in Kentucky.”

Dr. King asked, “Did you get a controversial bill like that passed? If so, how?”

I told him, “Yes, with some maneuvering and leverage. Their greatest interest that year was in a daylight savings time bill. Tom Garrett, my seat mate, was sponsor of the daylight savings time bill. The senate was split with urban senators favoring it and rural senators opposed. Tom chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee where my open housing bill was sent. Each time I asked him about the status of my bill, he would explain that every time he brought it up, he would lose a quorum. He then found out the opposition to his bill had 19 votes and he only had 18 in favor. In particular, he found out he had not secured my vote yet. The next morning, Tom met me at the Capitol door with the news my fair housing bill had reported favorably out of his committee. He thought that would settle it. He asked, ‘Now will you vote with me?’ I gave him a roll call sheet and told him, ‘If you get each of your people to commit to vote for the fair housing bill when it comes to the floor for a vote, I will vote with you.’”

Dr. King said, “I know he didn’t like all of that coming from a woman and a Negro woman at that, one who had out-witted him.”

I explained to King that three hours later Tom Garrett handed me back the roll call sheet with all the names checked. The vote on his bill was 19-19 and the Senate President, Wendell Ford, voted to pass the daylight savings time bill. When the fair housing bill came up for a vote, it passed 27-3 with 8 abstentions. It then passed the House of Representatives and went to Governor Louie Nunn who allowed it to become law without his signature. This bill was the very first fair housing law in the south.

Dr. King said, “I know when we came to Louisville to support you for the Senate and the three candidates for the House, that you would be more than worthy of the seat.”

I said then to Dr. King, “And, I will be forever thankful to you for your help in coming to Louisville three times last year to boost voter registration, and for sending the five tough field volunteers who worked the Projects to get the vote out.”

Dr. King joked, “We, or maybe I, have talked so long we have put our friends to sleep.” Ralph lay in the recliner with his legs elevated, asleep and snoring. Lukey was sitting on the bed by the window having a quiet conversation with A.D., who was sitting close by in the straight backed chair. Dr. King was sitting on the bed by the bathroom wall and I was sitting on the same bed as Lukey.

By this time, the five of us had been together in this room several hours patiently waiting to hear from the emissaries sent to the courthouse. There was a quiet solemnity that now hovered over the room. Even though the air was heavy from the five of us recycling it, we didn’t complain.

Dr. King and I had a few minutes to talk with each other privately. He said to me, “I am glad to be in this room with all of you here. It brings a sense of safety and peace to me. We are away from the crowds, the press and even the ‘bugs’ in my room.”

I asked him, “Do you worry about being under surveillance all of the time?”

He said emphatically, “I cannot afford to worry about J. Edgar Hoover, his FBI nor the MBI. You do know Memphis has one too? I have to live each day as if it were the last day of my life. It will happen one day when I least expect it. I am not worried though, as sometimes the load of being a leader gets almost too heavy to bear. Everyone expects you to be perfect, which is unfortunate.”

I said, “Yes, the bible tells us ‘we have all come short of the glory of God’! We have to try and live a good life by loving our Creator and loving our fellow man and woman.”

Martin laughed, teasingly saying, “I did not know he said woman.”

I retorted, “Did you know God loved woman as well as he did man? After he made man, he realized man lacked so much, he needed help and made woman to bring some sanity into the world.”

A.D. had fallen asleep in the chair, his chin on his chest and his mouth open, not quite snoring. Martin and I laughed so hard we woke

him up. A.D. sputtered, “What’s going on?!” We told him we were just trying to pass some quality time while we wait.

Ralph, the next to wake, said, “I could have used more sleep this morning. Martin woke me when he came in about 4:00 A.M.”

I said to Ralph, “You mean he stayed out all night? I guess he didn’t get much sleep either.”

Ralph didn’t answer, but instead spoke excitedly to A.D. regarding his inquiry about the staff meeting, saying, “A.D., the meeting went well as Martin ordered Andrew Young and Chauncey Eskridge, the attorney, to go to the courthouse and either get the temporary injunction that had been placed on the marchers lifted or to get it modified.”

A.D. said to Martin, “What if he doesn’t get it done? Wasn’t the plan to resume marching tomorrow? What happened?”

Martin answered A.D., “Even if it does not get done, we will march anyway.”

Ralph asked, “Martin, did you tell A.D. about the Invaders who intentionally started the

riot, the group who had said they didn't believe in non-violence?"

He said, "No, Ralph, I have not had a chance to tell him anything since he's been here.

Bernard said he recognized them and they were a bunch of trouble makers who wanted to make it appear they were in charge of the march."

Ralph chimed in and said, "A.D., it was bad. What started out to be a peaceful demonstration turned into a riot. There was a smashing of glass, shouts, screams, whistles and sirens. Martin told the official leader of the event, Jim Lawson, to call off the march. Martin was not willing to lead a violent march."

Dr. King then said, "We were lucky to see a black woman driving a Pontiac sedan who let us get into her car and we drove off. She moved from under the wheel and let Bernard drive. Ralph said the State Troopers were fitting on their gas masks. We looked out the rear view mirror and saw gas canisters flying through the air."

A.D. asked, "Where did you go from there? Did you go to the Lorraine?"

Martin spoke up saying, "No, we were trying to get to the Peabody Hotel. Bernard saw two motorcycle cops. He rolled down the window and asked them to help us get Dr. King out of there. One said, 'There is pandemonium at the Peabody!' The other one said, 'Just follow us.' They sped down River Side Drive and stopped at the Riverfront Holiday Inn. The policemen went inside and returned with a key for them."

Ralph added, "We didn't even have to check in. We thanked the woman for the use of her car and thanked the officers. We were given a two-bedroom suite and sitting area. Bernard and I took the room with two beds and Martin took the room with one bed."

Martin turned to him and said, "Ralph, tell them about the surprise visitors we had here yesterday after the riot."

Ralph then told us the story. "I answered the door and three young men were standing there. One of them said, 'We would like to

‘speak to Dr. King.’ I asked them, ‘Why do you want to see Dr. King?’ They said, ‘We want to apologize for the problems we caused him.’ I asked, ‘Who are you?’ and they replied, ‘We are the Invaders.’ When I went into Martin’s bedroom, he was in a deep sleep. I was hesitant about waking him up as I knew he was exhausted from what we had been through the past few days. I tapped him on the shoulder and told him who was there to see him and they wanted to confess to him personally. He was not in the mood to see anyone. He sat on the side of the bed to get his wits together for a few minutes. While he went to the bathroom, I went out to confront the visitors again. I told them they could only see him a few minutes. They assured me they would not take much of his time. When Martin came out, they stood at attention and addressed him. The spokesperson said, ‘Dr. King, we are really sorry for the damage we have caused to property and the damage to your reputation. We know now we should not have acted in the destructive way we did. Because of what we did, we brought death to one of our peers during the ruckus.’

We ask for your forgiveness and we promise you it will not happen again. If we can be of help if you decide to march again, we will keep the peace for you. Thank you for giving us a moment of your time.’ Dr. King responded, ‘Young men, I am grateful you have come to see me and that you realize the destruction you have caused in this community. When we decide what will happen next, and if there is another march, my staff will direct you to act as security in keeping the march on target.’ Martin shook hands with each of them and bid them well.”

A.D. questioned Ralph, saying, “Weren’t you taking a great chance on these irresponsible young men? Did they have any weapons or look in a strange way?”

“Yes, A.D.,” Ralph stated, “But I had to take the chance. They were well dressed and well groomed. I became curious when they said they wanted to apologize.”

Lukey spoke up saying, “Ralph, you took one hell of a chance with these unknown men.

You know how many threats M.L. gets on his life.”

A.D. added, “I’m glad it worked out.”

Ralph went on to tell us, “After they left, we had to prepare for a scheduled press conference to attend in the hotel lobby. The media tracked us down and Martin responded to their questions. Of course, they questioned him about the violence that occurred and he could only say that he did not know the people who started the actions that occurred. He made it clear he will not ever lead a violent march. If one gets out-of-hand, he will not continue. Martin did a great job with the hostile press. I told him it was a fine performance.”

Martin interjected, “Yes, and I told you, ‘If you think it was such a fine performance, do something for me. Get me out of Memphis today!’ Ralph made arrangements for us to leave and we were in Atlanta by 5:30 P.M. I was glad to be home.”

A.D. asked, “M.L., how is the Poor People’s Campaign planning coming along? We haven’t had time to talk about it.”

I said, “Dr. King, A.D. has been telling us in the Kentucky chapter that plans were being made for a poor people’s campaign. We were told that you planned to take poor people from all over the country to Washington, D.C. to expose the poverty in this country to the President and Congress. Are your plans developed yet and will it include us?”

“Before we came to Memphis,” Martin said, “We were working on plans over the objection of Jesse Jackson, James Bevel and Andy Young. They don’t think we can have a win with such a project, but we are going to do it anyway, with or without them.”

Lukey said, “It is possible that they object because poor people have no money. There are many people who are concerned about the plight of poor people because they do have power, but fail to use it. They won’t vote and most politicians are only concerned about the next election.”

I asked, “Dr. King, what gave you the idea of a poor people’s campaign?”

He responded, “You remember James Meredith’s ‘March Against Fear’? He was encouraging people to register and vote. After he was shot by a sniper and wounded on the first day of the march, two days later a group of black leaders joined the march so it would be continued. There was Floyd McKissick of Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Stokely Carmichael of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Ralph and I representing the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). I am sure there were other organizations and individuals representing other organizations. The Department of Justice said there were between 2500 and 3000 marchers.

“When we reached Marks, Mississippi, Ralph and I veered off the highway to visit what looked like a colored one-room school. We saw the dilapidated building and went inside. There was one teacher and as many as twenty students. The teacher invited us in. It was

almost lunch time, so she excused herself to prepare lunch for the children who looked to be malnourished with their very large eyes and prominent stomachs. The teacher opened a bag which contained apples and crackers. She cut the apple into quarters and gave each child a quarter of an apple and a few crackers. I asked her if that would be all they have to eat that day and she answered, ‘More than likely.’”

“So this is what triggered your thoughts to having a Poor People’s March to show the world that all Americans are not living in riches?” I then asked.

“More than that,” Martin explained, “Seeing the shacks, poor living conditions, emaciated children and the overall poverty displayed in Mississippi, I thought, ‘this is America, a rich country, while there are people living in these squalid conditions. We must do something about it.’ We can be affected by exposing this neglect by going to the President and Congress to try to improve the lives of these people.”

Ralph spoke up saying, “When Martin saw these conditions, that is when he came up with

the idea of a Poor People's Campaign, he could not get the sight off his mind."

Martin stood, saying to us, "We've got to do something. I proposed the plan to the SCLC Executive Board and opposition came from unexpected members. They were more concerned with losing face than about exposing the poverty in this country. We talked with our advisers, Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison, who thought it was an excellent idea. We continued traveling in the south recruiting supporters."

A.D. asked, "What can we do in Kentucky to help? You can count us in. Our chapter of the KCLC is growing and we can start preparing."

"Lukey, now you see what I mean when I say that 'these preachers do the planning to do major projects, then we do the work and they take the credit.'" I responded. We all chuckled a bit, knowing it was true.

A.D. said, "That is the reason in the bible you are called helpmates. It was destined

for you to be an aid to your mates and male friends.”

I answered back, “A.D., you just made that up. That is not scriptural.”

Getting serious again, Martin said, “So far, A.D., we anticipate there will be poor people coming from the west, especially American Indians from the reservations. Blacks will be coming from the south. I wish we could transport some of those shacks they are forced to exist in to D.C. Poor whites are no better off in Appalachia. Our workers will go into those areas and organize the people. We will furnish buses and routes for stops overnight in strategic cities. For example, the travelers from the west could stop over in Louisville and continue on the next day to Washington. In the meantime, we will have workers building tents to stay in when they arrive. We will definitely keep in touch when the logistics are worked out.”

Ralph told us, “Someone came up with the idea to call it ‘Resurrection City’. The living conditions will be better than what they have back home. There has been some talk about

moving their shacks on flatbed trucks to D.C. We squashed that idea.”

Lukey asked if anything had been worked out for bathing and toilet facilities saying, “They may be poor, but they like to be clean.”

Ralph said to her, “Those details will have to be worked out.”

A.D. asked, “Lukey, would you mind finding a cleaners and take my pants to be pressed? Also, we need some snacks. M.L. and Ralph had a platter of fish at the restaurant late this morning before they came but we have had nothing to eat.” He then whispered to her, “Bring me a beer.”

Knowing it would draw a sassy response, I said to A.D., “Did you bring your pants here with you or do you expect to sit here all day in your b v d’ s?”

A.D. came back with, “The pants are in my room, Miss Smarty.”

Lukey said she’d get his pants and find a cleaners and also bring back some snacks. During this jovial encounter between us, Dr.

King was laying on top of the bed looking at the ceiling seemingly in deep thought and staying out of our conversations.

After Lukey left, the conversation centered on her. Dr. King said, “A.D., I am surprised at you and that white woman are still working together. It was just last year when I was in Louisville during Derby weekend when you announced we would ‘Stop the Derby!’ We had that meeting with W.J. Hodge, Leo Lesser and other preachers to talk about strategy after you made that big announcement. I recall she was asked to leave the meeting because some of you suspected her of reporting decisions made by the group to the FBI. When we left to go to your house, she was sitting outside the door crying. Did you ever stop confiding in her? How did you ameliorate that confrontation?”

Lukey was the secretary of the AOCR and, for the most part, the volunteers under our care remained safe and sound. I don’t know if she was a spy, and I didn’t know at the time the extent of Hoover’s FBI vacuuming up and disrupting our work through illegal

microphones, Cointelpro, and the CIA's Operation Chaos. It never occurred to me that folks were capable of doing that type of harm.

"Dr. King," I said, "I can answer that for you. Her mother died in New York. Lukey, an only child, received \$150,000 from her estate. A.D. did not think it was advisable to push her out of the inner circle just at the time when she was financially helping him and the organization. The rest answers for itself, right A.D.?"

"After that we excluded her from the plans we made or gave her incorrect information for her to report," A.D. added.

I asked him, "Do you remember when Raoul (Cunningham, the Executive Director of KCLC) picked up the phone and heard Lukey on the line reporting to 'Mr. Jones', the FBI agent, telling him of our future plans?"

A.D. replied, "That was when we changed our strategy."

Dr. King said to me, "Senator, I remember when Ralph and I were there last year. We had to move from the hotel because it was booked

up for Derby guests. My brother arranged for us to move to your home to stay overnight. We stopped at a rib place on the way and bought some good soul food to bring with us to your house. I also remember the next morning you awakened us to look out your front window to see the FBI agents sitting in front of the house in a white van reading the morning paper.”

“I remember that day well,” I reminisced, “You stood in my living room with your manuscript hanging to the floor as you read from your latest book, ‘Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community’. At one point you got very excited and dramatic, loudly and emphatically stating, ‘I am a writer!’ Also, I remember you received a call from Stanley Levison who was in New York. You said he was your Adviser. You talked to him a few minutes and handed me the telephone to write what he would tell me. It was a question asked by Morley Pushon and you quote it often, ‘Cowardice asks, is it safe? Expediency asks, is it politic? Vanity asks, is it popular? But

conscience asks, is it right?' You were very excited as you read it over and over."

Dr. King asked his brother, "A.D., when you said to the press 'We will stop the Derby', how did you intend doing it?"

I answered for him telling King, "He said, 'A fleet-footed young man would run out on the track in front of the first horse coming around the track and upset the horses.' I suggested that A.D. lose some weight, practice track at U of L and be in physical shape to do the run. He didn't like that idea too much."

Dr. King then said, "I think he would be a little slow for that run."

A.D. changed the subject by reminding his brother the scare that M.L. gave us last August when we had planned a huge voter registration drive which included a motorcade and a rally at Green Street Baptist Church. The parade was to start at noon. "You called me an hour before the parade was to begin saying you were exhausted and didn't feel well. We began thinking about a substitute speaker, but could

not think of anyone as you had been advertised as the speaker. Two hours later you called and said, 'I will try to make it' and gave me your flight number. We were excited and started the parade to circle the west end of Louisville. I sent Leo Lesser to pick you up and bring you to the Beecher Terrace Project where we waited for you. You addressed the residents of the housing project over the bullhorn as you sat on the open convertible car as the parade made its way to the church."

I said, "Doctor, you were dynamic that evening. What you said was strong and powerful. You said, 'Either the Negro must be granted freedom or will have to be exterminated. We have the resources to solve the problem, but the question is, do we have the will?' I am still worried about our national will."

A.D. said, "I remember you saying, 'Everybody is shouting 'get whitey', but they burn down the places where whitey is non-existent and you ask the questions, 'Whose children suffer? Who gets killed?'"

We were on a roll of conversation, one that woke Ralph up from his nap. Ralph said to us, “It sounds like you have a heated discussion.”

We also spent time talking strategy. Dr. King outlined a series of programs he said would relieve unemployment and other causes of discontent of the Negro. He suggested the institution of the postal service to expand mail deliveries two or three times a day. He wanted to supply more money to hospitals to eliminate staff shortages and thought federal funds should be given to schools to hire more teacher’s aides for every classroom. King called for a guaranteed minimum wage for every person, whether employed or not. He objected to “the government for spending \$35 billion dollars fighting an evil war in Vietnam but refusing to spend \$44 million to get rats out of the ghettos.” That called for a hearty laugh from each of us.

Lukey returned with A.D.’s pressed pants along with potato chips, pretzels, Twinkies and several flavors of sodas. I told her, “You have been gone so long, we have resolved all the

problems of the world while you were away. How many times did you get lost?"

She replied, "I thought since it was such a nice day, I would ride around and see some of Memphis."

I asked Lukey, "Did you go down on Beale Street?"

She answered back, "I wanted to, but changed my mind."

I then said to Martin, "Dr. King, you came to Louisville three times last year and sent five of your staff members to help us get folks out to vote. One time you were there, we took you to the south end to show you where we had been marching to Wyandotte Park. Lesser was driving and you were sitting on the passenger side when someone threw a rock that hit you in the face. That strike gave you the topic for the rally that evening, 'Upon This Rock' and you had people jumping up in the aisles and screaming 'tell the truth!'"

A.D. dialed his mother in Atlanta and talked to her for a few minutes. We could not hear

what the conversation was, but we heard him say that his brother was here and wanted to talk with her. When A.D. finished his conversation, he handed the phone to Dr. King who spoke with his mother, "I am doing fine, just resting today." She must have asked him about the riot as he said, "I'm not worried. It is peaceful today and I am enjoying being here with my brother and friends."

After the phone conversation was over he said to us, "My mother worries about the death threats I get. I don't know how she finds out. She thinks some idiot is really going to do it. I cannot worry about that. I have to live each day and hope and pray it does not happen."

Ralph asked, "Martin, there are leaders who are advising Negroes to 'burn, baby, burn'. What do you think will happen if they took this advice?"

He answered, "I don't care who promotes violence. I will forever be committed to peace. The riots are morally not effective and practically unsound. Riots merely add to the sickness of this country. They intensify fears

in whites, yet relieve them of their guilt for the poverty and degradation of the ghetto dwellers.”

Ralph said, “Martin, you know I agree with everything you have said. I just want to go forward with the Poor People’s Campaign.”

Dr. King urged, “There is one more thing I want to say and that is we need to ‘vote, baby, vote’. We need to get up off our do nothing stools of complacency and do for ourselves and the nation. I’ve seen it work before. Every politician respects and loves votes.”

I chimed in with, “Yes, we do!”

This was more than talk. His volunteers were instrumental in helping organize voters for my successful election to the Senate. I was the first female and the first Negro elected in the Kentucky Senate. Mae Street Kidd was elected in the Kentucky House at the same time, and we were already becoming an effective team in shepherding progressive laws through both houses. Kidd and I spent many nights together reading bills all the way through.

Martin continued by saying, "Senator, you know open housing is an important issue, but if the central cities were destined to become predominately Negro, the black population should work for capturing political power." He chuckled, saying, "Then we will tax everybody who works in the city and lives in the suburbs." That got a hearty laugh from all of us.

Lukey wondered aloud, "I wonder what is going on at the courthouse. It seems Andy and Chauncey should be back by now with some news."

I added, "Yes, we have been waiting for four hours, but the time has passed quickly. Ralph had a long nap and A.D. took a nod."

Ralph reminded us, "Remember, I did not get too much sleep last night and was up early this morning for the staff meeting."

I joked, "I think Ralph has a case of narcolepsy. Whenever there is a serious conversation or a serious discussion, I believe he pretends he's asleep and doesn't know what's going on. Have you all noticed that?"

A.D. quipped, “I think that’s pretty smart. That way, he doesn’t have to answer any questions. He can always say that he fell asleep at that time.”

We all had a good laugh at Ralph’s expense.

Chapter 7

King, The Actor

There were two sides to Dr. King's character.

To the public, he was an intellectual dedicated to God and social justice. He was a courageous, fearless, and most eloquent advocate for non-violence. As a stern preacher who saw the world in a moral sense between Good and Evil, he was profoundly serious.

Among friends, he exuded warmth, enjoyed having fun and liked to tease about women who flirted with him. He was a gifted orator and actor who enjoyed soul food, barbequed ribs, collard greens, macaroni and cheese along with his sweet potatoes and cornbread.

His lighter side included doing impressions. He would be standing in the middle of the floor doing his preaching act, imitating 'black whoopers'. He often told what he called 'Hilly Stories'. Hilly Thomas was a black preacher in Atlanta who stuttered. Martin would tell one Hilly story after the other with Hilly's mannerisms, his movements and

his stuttering which Martin had down pat. He told one story about when to use the term 'I' and when to use 'me' as he told it to a group of black preachers with Hilly present.

Dr. King said, "This is a hypothetical example. You have been out too late one night and get home about 2:00 A.M. Your wife has locked the door. You knock and hear her saying, 'Who is it?' Which do you say, 'It is I' or 'It is me'? He waved his arms and begged to answer. 'If I stayed out til t-t-two in the m-m-morning and knocked on the d-d-door and m-m-my wife asked, 'who is it?', I'd answer her in a most pleasing voice, 'B-B-Baby, this is m-m-me!'"

Another of his favorite stories about Hilly was a sermon Martin had heard him preach. Martin said, "Hilly announced, 'I am going to preach this m-m-morning on the t-t-text God Is Love! And, my subject is 'Is'. Is is not a noun. Is is not a verb. Is just is.'"

Martin was talking loud and waving his arms around making motions to emphasize his point and 'whooping' as he said some preachers

do. We were laughing so hard, we were holding our sides and stomachs. “Is is like, ‘Is you got your ticket? Is you going? Is just is.” Once Martin got started acting, he would go on for an hour and have his audience rolling on the floor.

That day, as we laughed and joked around, Martin was very relaxed and laid back.

Dr. King asked me, “Senator, would you like to go to Billy Kyle’s house tonight for a soul dinner?”

I answered him back with, “I sure do. The potato chips are long gone.”

He said, “Reverend Solomon Jones will drive and you will ride with me.”

I exclaimed, “Oh! You have a chauffeur?”

He chuckled, “Well, he drives me in a Cadillac borrowed from a funeral home when I am in Memphis. A.D., do you plan to go to dinner with us?”

A.D. replied, “I am too tired from the long ride from Florida, yesterday.”

Lukey spoke up and said, "I am too tired as well."

I said to her, "I can see why you are too tired, Lukey, since you drove all the way from Florida. I guess A.D. is tired from navigating and keeping you awake. I don't remember him asking you to assist in the driving."

A.D. just groaned at the teasing.

I answered the knock at the door. It was Andrew Young. Dr. King asked him, "What happened?"

Andrew thought he would tease King by saying the judge had said no way would he allow another march since King had led a march with violence and then took off. Young was laughing by now and King knew he was joking.

King said to Young, "Now, tell us what happened."

Young answered, "He modified the injunction and said we could march, but we better keep it peaceful."

King playfully threw a bed pillow at Andrew and said, "I knew we would get it taken care of."

I think Judge Bailey Brown knew we were going to march regardless.” Andrew Young threw the pillow back at Dr. King.

After a conversation about the soul dinner, Young left. After five hours together, the four were about to leave my room. It was automatic that Ralph was going to the dinner. Wherever King was invited, Ralph felt like it was his invitation too. He always kept his face and body right next to King whether it was in a march, a press conference or in the pulpit. I feel that Martin and Ralph were closer than Martin and his brother. They knew each other’s moods, temperaments, idiosyncrasies and habits.

As they were leaving the room, the last statement Dr. King made to me was, “Senator, I am going upstairs and freshen up. I will knock on your door when I come down. Solomon will drive us to Billy Kyle’s house.”

I said to Martin, “I will be ready.”

Chapter 8

The Fatal Shot

As I was dressing, I could hear Dr. King on the balcony talking to the crowded courtyard, to Jesse Jackson, Ben Branch, the musician and others. My room, #201, was on the first floor of the two-story building and separated from the long main section of the motel. I could see Martin from my window.

In my mind I thought, "I wish he would just shut up and come on and let's go."

After I was ready, I decided I would go out into the courtyard and join Jesse while I waited. As I approached the door, I heard this one very loud shot - PO-WOW. I then heard a woman scream, "Oh my God, they've shot Dr. King!"

I immediately opened my door. The courtyard crowd had taken cover. I looked to the right and saw uniformed men entering the courtyard. I looked to the left on the balcony and saw Dr. King's knee and one foot.

I rushed up the metal and concrete stairwell and ran to Dr. King's room. As I stepped inside

room #306, I saw Ralph Abernathy and Billy Kyle trying feverishly to get an ambulance. I did not say anything to either of them.

I then stepped outside onto the balcony to where Dr. King lay. I was standing there alone with him. I don't remember if I said it out loud or thought it in my mind, "Oh my God, he's dead."

His skin had already become an oily gray, and a pool of blood spread underneath him. His tie had been severed by the bullet between the knot and his shirt collar an inch from the knot, under which the newly shortened end was standing up. It was obvious to me that if the tie was cut, the bullet had to have gone into his neck. Many reports have said his face was damaged by the bullet. When I looked at his face, I did not see any damage.

Within minutes, a black ambulance came racing into the courtyard. It looked like an old limousine I used to see when I was young. When they arrived, I went downstairs.

The medical technicians rushed up the other stairwell. When they got to Dr. King, they opened his shirt and started administering aid to him. They soon brought him down the stairwell on a cot and then placed him into the ambulance.

As they lifted Martin into the ambulance, I instinctively started to go with them. Andy Young stopped me and said, “No, Senator, I don’t think you want to do that.” The van sped out of the motel courtyard with sirens wailing. Ralph stayed with Dr. King in the ambulance ride to the hospital.

After Dr. King was shot no one hugged him, talked to him or attempted to hold him as some have reported.

After the ambulance left the motel, it occurred to me that neither A.D. nor Lukey knew what had just happened.

Chapter 9

Brother's Reaction

I knocked on the door to room #207, A.D. King's door. A.D. was asleep and Lukey was sitting in the recliner. When she answered the door, I whispered to her, "Lukey, Dr. King has been shot and I believe he is dead."

She said to me, "Let me tell A.D." She lit a cigarette and walked around to the other side of the bed and said, "A.D., M.L. has been shot."

While she spoke with Martin's brother, I turned on the television to check for information. The news of the shooting of Dr. Martin Luther King was blasting and blaring on all stations. The announcers were saying King had been shot and not expected to live. Some of the stations were saying a "white man" was suspected of the shooting. When A.D. heard that, he went berserk. He was like a madman. He cursed the world and everybody in it. I told him he could not go outside of the hotel room cursing until he had his raw emotions under control.

When I stepped outside the hotel room door, there were already three television cameras pointed at his door. I told two staff members to stand by in case A.D. had not calmed down. After a half an hour, we convinced him that he needed to have a prepared statement in his mind to say. Lukey and I came up with some suggestions for him.

He finally said, "G.D., I am ready now." We came out of the room together, A.D., Lukey and I, and he managed to answer the many questions asked of him.

A.D. then had Lukey drive us to Billy Kyle's home. We went upstairs and settled into the den. As we tried to make long distance calls, the operator responded by saying, "All the wires are busy." However, when we said, "We are calling Dr. King's family and friends," they put us through immediately. The phone calls were made as A.D. advised us.

Afterward, we left the Kyle home and went to a Holiday Inn in order to change hotels for the night; however, the proprietor said that

there were “no vacancies”. We then returned to the Lorraine Motel at around 11:00 P.M.

My body was shivering and I was told I was in shock. I called to the motel front desk for a blanket but never received one.

When I finally fell asleep around 4:00 A.M., I was awakened by the sound of two men who were now on the balcony scraping dried blood from the concrete. It was so unnerving and so shrilling that I shook uncontrollably.

The next morning, I was told that the owner, who was a woman, had died of heart failure during this time frame.

Chapter 10

Moments of Silence

At 7:00 A.M., A.D. and Lukey came to my room. A.D. told me that he was contacted by Abernathy to be prepared to return with Dr. King's body. Robert Kennedy had offered his plane for the return of Martin's body to Atlanta, Georgia. A procession of limousines and cars were available at the motel to drive us to the funeral home where Dr. King's body lay.

Upon arriving at the funeral home, we saw media and photographers there. We saw them taking pictures of Dr. King laying there in the open casket. When the funeral director closed the casket, the staff then carried it to the hearse. The long procession followed the hearse to the airport. According to A.D., there were more than thirty people on the plane.

He said, "It was a long and solemn ride with M.L.'s body in the rear of the plane. It was God's will for me to be sleeping in my room right below his when he was shot. If I had been on that balcony or in the open court, and saw

my brother lying there dead, I would have had a heart attack and gone berserk. This is the worst nightmare of my life.”

Although it would not have made any difference of the outcome, even if he had been close by, his reaction was that he was sorry he had to be told. Personally, I don’t believe A.D. ever recovered from the shock of getting the devastating information from me and seeing it as news on television.

Before he left for the airport, A.D. hugged me for a very long time. He rubbed my back and said to me, “G.D., since this happened, I am glad you were here and my brother was happy you were here, too.”

Lukey and I arrived in Atlanta on Friday and checked into the Marriott hotel as A.D. had asked us to do. A.D. came to the hotel later that evening and the three of us went to the hotel restaurant for dinner. During the conversations, A.D. asked us if we would like to go to his brother’s home the next day to express our condolences to Dr. King’s widow, Coretta. He wanted to go, but did not want to go alone. I

don't know what happened between them, but he never spoke highly of her. A.D. picked us up the next afternoon and the three of us drove together to Dr. King's home.

It was a small ordinary house with a living room across the front. There was a wide opening with no doors that led into the den. As we walked through the front room towards the den, we could see Coretta King sitting on a couch. Two or three people were in front of us offering their condolences and several people were coming in behind us. A.D. was in front. I was behind him and Lukey followed me. I don't know what A.D. said to Coretta as he shook her hand.

I shook her hand as well, saying to her, "I am so sorry."

The following day, Lukey and I visited Ebenezer Baptist Church where Dr. King lay in state. The line was two blocks long when we got there. There was a deep solemnity in the air and some were crying openly, wiping their tears away. Some people were wringing their hands and moaning out loud while others just had a

very sad and unbelieving expression on their face. Many had their hands folded before their face and were softly praying.

The funeral was scheduled for Tuesday, April 9, 1968 with two separate ceremonies. The first ceremony was to be held at Ebenezer Baptist Church and the second service at King's alma mater, Morehouse College. A.D. kept us informed about the arrangements and told us, "Plans were being made to transport Dr. King's body from the church to Morehouse. To emphasize Dr. King's commitment to poor people, it was decided that the cortége would be led by two mules with the casket on a wheeled cart. It has not been easy finding two coordinated mules."

Lukey and I looked at each other and in unison asked, "Two coordinated mules?"

"Yes, two mules who like each other and can work in unison."

We laughed and I said, "A.D., you're kidding!"

“No, Ralph had left it up to Hosea Williams to comb the country and find the two coordinated mules, which he did. He was able to convince the farmer-owner that we just needed them for one day. The procession was to go from the church to the Morehouse College campus. A much bigger crowd could be accommodated for those who want to pay tribute to M.L.”

A.D. also informed us that on the eve of the funeral we were to board the ‘celebrity’ bus which would then bring us to the funeral at Ebenezer Baptist Church on Auburn Avenue. We were in the lobby of the motel when the bus driver came in and said his bus was going to the church. We were the first to board the bus and had a choice of seats. Celebrities started filling the bus.

When we arrived at our destination we found the church to be already packed beyond capacity. We were able to be seated along with the dignitaries. The New York Times listed the following among the attending: Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey, Attorney

General Ramsey Clark, Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz, Under Secretary of State Nichols Katzenbach, Associate Justice Thurgood Marshall, Secretary of HUD Robert C. Weaver, Senator Edward Brooke, Governor Nelson Rockefeller, Governor George Romney, Senator Jacob Javits, Senator Edward Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, Senator Eugene McCarthy, Senator Wayne Morris, Senator Harrison Williams, San Francisco Mayor John Lindsey, U.N. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, U.N. Undersecretary Ralph Bunche, Mrs. John F. Kennedy, and hundreds of entertainers, too many to list. As I went through the list writing this autobiography, I noticed that most of the people who are listed are now deceased.

The church was crowded, Dr. King's family had difficulty getting into the church and being seated. Crowds of people blocked the entrance ways. A.D. King went to the pulpit and made two announcements. He said, "Our hearts are heavy at this time. Please let the family through the crowd. You would surely want Dr. King's wife and children, his mother and father,

and immediate family members to see this service.” Some people blocking the way were so determined to keep their spot, the crowd did not move.

A.D. went back to the microphone a second time, and told the crowd, “If we cannot get your cooperation, we have but one choice and that is to remove the body and have a private funeral.” Finally, the family members were able to push their way in and get seated in their designated pews. Mrs. King requested Reverend Ralph Abernathy to officiate at both services and to conduct the committal service at the graveside.

The service began an excerpt of a sermon that Martin preached in his church. The ghost of Dr. King’s voice echoed through the sanctuary, “If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don’t want a long funeral. And, if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell him not to talk too long. I’d like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life trying to serve others. I’d like somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to love

somebody. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe the naked. I want you to say on that day I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say I tried to love and serve humanity.”

There was not a dry eye in the church. The men had their white handkerchiefs out wiping their eyes and the women were dabbing their eyes with their handkerchiefs trying to keep their makeup in place, without much luck.

The program followed with some of the old and familiar hymns: “Where He Leads Me”, “When I Survey The Wondrous Cross”, “Softly and Tenderly” and “My Living Has Not Been In Vain.”

Dr. Harold DeWolf, Dr. King’s professor at Boston University, preached the eulogy. He spoke of King’s dedication to the oppressed and how the living had a responsibility to the dead. He said, “It is now for us, all the millions of the living who care to take up his torch of love. It is for us to finish his work, to end the awful destruction in Vietnam, to root out every trace of race prejudice from our lives, to bring

the massive powers of this nation to aid the oppressed and heal the hate-scarred world.”

The recession was directed and led by Reverend Abernathy and as he read the 23rd Psalms. Members of the Executive Staff of the SCLC, the pallbearers, placed the casket onto the wagon.

The two “well-coordinated mules” leaned forward into their load and began, in tandem, to pull the weight of the wagon. The processional had begun.

The progress of the processional, which was now moving towards Morehouse University, was being recorded by the media. There were more than fifty thousand people slowly marching in the cortége and there were more than one hundred thousand on the streets and the highway. A.D., Lukey and I were walking together and had started out near the front of the line. The sun was blazing and the heat was unmerciful for the five mile long stretch to the college. People were passing out from the heat and fainting. The medics were kept busy carrying people out on stretchers.

As Ralph began to speak, their father, Dr. Martin Luther King, Sr. shouted out for Ralph to “cut it short” because “people were dying out here.” Ralph tried to continue the program with several prominent clergymen who were scheduled to speak, but ‘Daddy’ King rose again and said, “Ralph, get Mays up there and end this.” Ralph changed the format and called Dr. Benjamin Mays, the President emeritus of Morehouse College, to give the principal address.

As Dr. Mays came to the podium, the crowd was getting loud and boisterous. We could not hear the famous public speaker due to the noise. We were told Dr. Mays said, “Martin drew no distinction between high and low, between rich and poor. Martin would probably say that, if death had to come, I’m sure there is no greater cause to die for than fighting to get a just wage for garbage collectors.

“King was supra-race, supra-nation, supra-denomination, supra-class and supra-culture. He belonged to the world and to mankind. He now belongs to posterity.”

The last event of the day was a four mile trip to the South View Cemetery. Many of the people did not go to the cemetery, especially the 'special' guests.

As Ralph Abernathy committed Dr. King's body to the earth, he said, "This cemetery is too small for his spirit but we submit his body to the ground. The grave is too narrow for his soul but we commit his body to the ground. No coffin, no crypt, no stone can hold his greatness."

BIOGRAPHIES:

DR. MARTIN LUTHER, KING. JR.

Dr. Martin Luther, King Jr. was born to Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. and Alberta Williams King in Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929. He earned a B.A. degree in sociology from Morehouse College in Atlanta, a B.D. degree from Crozier Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, and was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Boston University. He was pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, founder (1957) and President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), author of many books, including his last book, "Where Do We Go From Here, Chaos or Community?".

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a man of peace. His message transcended the struggle for equality for black people in this country. On December 10, 1964, he was awarded the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of this great commitment, in Oslo, Norway.

Dr. King was a small man in stature, 5'8" in height and 150 pounds. He was a meticulous dresser, usually in black silk suit and black hat. His voice was authoritative and strong with a command of the English language.

REV. ALFRED DANIELS WILLIAMS KING

Reverend Alfred Daniels Williams King (A.D. King) was born to Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr. and Alberta Williams King in Atlanta, Georgia on July 30, 1930. He was a graduate of Morehouse College in 1959. He was pastor of several churches including Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Newman, Georgia; Ensley Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama; and, Zion Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky from 1965-1968. He was founder and organizer of the Kentucky Christian Leadership Conference (KCLC), an affiliate of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He was active in the civil rights movement in the south prior to coming to Louisville, Kentucky.

He was an advocate for public accommodations, fair housing laws and other social justice community issues. He became

the associate pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia after his brother Martin's death. He was a robust man, standing 5'8" at 185 pounds.

On July, 21, 1969, Reverend A.D. Williams King was found drowned in his backyard swimming pool in Atlanta, Georgia.

REV. RALPH DAVID ABERNATHY

Reverend Ralph David Abernathy was born in Marengo County, Alabama. He received his B.S. degree from Alabama State University and a Master's degree from Atlanta University. He was pastor of Eastern Star Baptist Church in Demopolis, Alabama and moved to Atlanta, Georgia to become pastor of Hunter Street Baptist Church in 1951. He served in World War II. He became president of Southern Christian Leadership Conference after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

He organized the Poor People's Campaign which took place in Washington, D.C. in 1969. African Americans, whites, Native Americans, Appalachian poor and sympathizers traveled to Washington, D.C. to expose the poverty in this country to President Lyndon B. Johnson, Congress and the world. They came by mule trains, on foot and by bus. They

built “Resurrection City” in D.C. as an area of living quarters and built it using canvas tents, plywood and straw. It wasn’t much, but the ‘residents’ said it was better than they had back in Mississippi where they lived.

Reverend Abernathy published his much criticized book, “And the Wall Came Tumbling Down” in 1989. Many who criticized his story did not want to face the truth of the inner circle of the movement. Much he wrote about was accurate.

He was a robust man, 5’9” in height and two hundred plus pounds in weight. He died April 17, 1990.

MRS. LUCRETIA BALDWIN WARD

Mrs. Lucretia “Lukey” Baldwin Ward, was a female civil rights activist. She supported the 1964 “March on Frankfort” advocating a public accommodations bill which became the “Kentucky Civil Rights Act” (1966). Mrs. Ward was one of the founders and Secretary of Kentucky Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and founder of the Women’s Alliance of Louisville, a member of the Kentucky Commission on Women and Jefferson County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council.

She was born in New York and became the mother of five children, including one-term Congressman Michael Ward. As one supporter said, “She was white and a daughter and wife. She risked personal danger, contributed much of her inheritance and endured taunts to herself and her children. But, the all consuming battle against racial oppression kept her going

and kept her focused on the prize.” My dear friend, Lukey Ward, died in 1996 in Louisville, Kentucky.

SENATOR GEORGIA M. DAVIS POWERS

Senator Georgia M. Davis Powers, Kentucky State Senator (1967-1988), was born to Ben Gore Montgomery and Frances Walker Montgomery. She was Chair of Volunteers in several political campaigns including those of Wilson W. Wyatt for U.S. Senate (1962), Edward T. “Ned” Breathitt for Governor (1963), and Representative Norbert Blume for Congress (1964). Senator Powers was founder, Executive Board Member and Office Manager of Allied Organizations for Civil Rights (AOCR) which sponsored the “March on Frankfort” advocating a public accommodations’ bill and equal employment bill in the Kentucky House of Representatives (1964).

She was founder and Executive Board Member of the Kentucky Christian Leadership Conference (a Chapter of Southern Christian Leadership Conference, known as the SCLC)

which organized marches in Louisville for public accommodations and supported a candidate for the Kentucky State Senate in 1967.

In her twenty-one years as State Senator, she never lost an election and won battles over housing, labor and discrimination matters. Senator Powers championed bills for open housing, low cost housing, labor. She was called by her colleagues the “conscience” of the Senate. Senator Powers has published three other books since her retirement in 1988: “I Shared The Dream”, an autobiography; “The Adventures of the Book of Revelation”, a bible prophecy; and “Celia’s Land”, a biography.

In the summer of 1968, Senator Powers’ first volunteer activity was again with the Sanitation Workers in St. Petersburg, Florida. Feeling that the movement was not progressing, she felt that more proactive civil disobedience was necessary. At a church meeting, she recruited praying women to kneel in the road and pray in the path of the scab workers driving the garbage trucks.

“I told the women, if you have children or if you are afraid of dying, don’t participate. Five women showed up the next morning in the rain. We knelt across the road where the trucks were coming out, and the women were praying and I was saying, ‘Don’t move’. They were trying times.”

Senator Powers was awarded five honorary doctorate degrees:

University of Kentucky

Doctor of Law

University of Louisville

Doctor of Humane Letters

Kentucky State University

Doctor of Humane Letters

Spalding University

Doctor of Public Service

Simmons University

Doctor of Humane Letters

University of Kentucky created a ‘Georgia Powers’ endowment protecting women from violence. It raised over one million dollars its first year.

In 2010, the Kentucky Interstate 264 East was renamed the Georgia Powers Expressway by the Kentucky Legislature.

As of the publication of this book, Senator Powers is a healthy and vibrant advocate for the under served in church and in the community

She operates a nonprofit foundation whose primary purpose is giving scholarships and educational assistance.

Those interested in donating to the foundation, a 501(c)3 organization, may do so here:

Georgia Powers Foundation, Inc.

P.O. Box 3174

Louisville, KY 40201